

01.07.07: Inaugural Address

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January 7, 2007

In 1863 my mother's grandfather and his siblings came to California, leaving Ireland and then New England to mine for gold in the Sierra foothills. They marked their claims near Mokelumne Hill, at that time a small city of 10,000. They worked hard, but ultimately found far more rock than pay dirt. So they turned to cattle ranching, which seemed more profitable. As the Gold Rush wound down, some say the smart ones moved on and the rest stayed. When I arrived at the Chili Gulch ranch in 1945, the town had just 500 people, an historic hotel, tumbled-down homes, and various old timers who told tales of the good ol' days long since past. My schooling was at the same three room schoolhouse that my grandfather and mother attended; my eighth grade class consisted of just five boys, and no girls.

The history of Mokelumne Hill might lead some to believe that the California magic that drew my great grandfather here had disappeared. Of course it had not. In 1863, my great grandfather could not have anticipated a 21st century California that is the envy of the world. Instead of 24-karat nuggets, a powerful succession of advancements in agriculture, oil, entertainment, aviation, aerospace, computer technology, biotechnology, and now stem cell research brought millions of people to our state. Each of those industries created new and greater wealth for the ever-increasing number of people who sought the California Dream.

Those early gold seekers and each succeeding generation were hard-wired with an expectation of a better world. By taking care of the land, establishing schools and churches, organizing cities and towns, building roads and bridges, powering commerce and industry, they set the foundation for a world they would never see.

What will be said of us?

Will history judge that we - in the early days of the 21st century - set the stage for the 22nd century California by design, or by default? Will our descendants honor our stewardship, or regret the opportunities lost by shortsighted policies and selfish consumption?

We can't imagine the economy of the future. None of us can define the dimensions of the frontiers that will be conquered in the next 90 years, or anticipate all the challenges to be faced. But the essential foundations of prosperity are no different today than they have been at any time in California's past.

We must begin with mother earth. The California we envision depends on our deciding today to reverse the environmental trajectory on which we have placed our planet. Just as miners of the 19th and 20th century gnawed at and destroyed the land, the flawed energy policies of America and other advanced economies threaten to create an "Inconvenient Truth." Now, it is abundantly clear that human activity is changing the climate of our world and foisting upon the next generations a far different environment and climate with challenges and effects far greater and more serious than any we have endured.

This crisis looms larger than the OPEC oil embargo of 1978, the year I took office as a Senator. Imagine if we had followed President Jimmy Carter's program to make us energy independent? Instead we slipped back into our old ways of excessive consumption of oil and coal. Now we watch with concern the emerging nations of the world following our lead, consuming more and more carbon based fuels.

Thankfully last year the legislature and the Governor understood the challenge and placed California as a leader in addressing the climate crisis. My work on this goes back to 1978 when I authored the first tax credit law for conservation, solar and wind energy systems. As your Lt. Governor I will work with policymakers at every level, public and private, to use all my knowledge and experience to enact programs that reduce our consumption of carbon fuels, seek renewable energy sources, establish the most effective carbon trading system possible, and address the inevitable changes that will affect the our water supplies, flood control systems and our public health.

Historians of the 22nd century will not look kindly upon us if we refuse to address our fundamental duty of passing on knowledge and preparing the next generation for the challenges that they will face. In 1966, when Patti and I graduated from UC Berkeley, we had been given the best public education in the nation by the taxpayers of the post war period. Today, despite extraordinary efforts by teachers working the most difficult of classrooms, many California students are burdened with an education that is far from the best, and in some cases fails completely.

The California we envision provides the finest and most accessible public education in the world. The research being done on brain development compels us to look for new ways to ensure that children are born healthy, that they spend their very earliest years in stimulating environments filled with books and language and the arts and physical activity, and that they are protected from environmental toxins. California's children should grow up expecting to spend at least 14 years in school, and a lifetime of learning. We must surround our children with an expectation of excellence and the tools they need to achieve it.

As your Lt. Governor I will use my position as a Regent of the University of California and a Trustee of the State University System to keep those critical institutions in the leadership of higher education, providing the most advanced research and the best education at an affordable price to every qualified California student. I will work to fully fund our schools at every level and ensure that our teachers are fully prepared and supported in the classroom. I will encourage policymakers at every level to improve and simplify administration, apply the awesome research capabilities of our universities to the complex task of teaching in classrooms with multiple languages and cultures, and to maximize the use of technology. Efficiency and effectiveness must be the criteria by which we judge any solution. We cannot waste taxpayer money and we certainly cannot waste even one child.

America must have a vastly improved health care system. As the richest nation on earth we cannot continue to allow 46 million of our fellow citizens, 7 million here in our own state, to be at risk of losing their life and their entire wealth because they have no health insurance. We spend more of our country's wealth on health care than any other nation (16% versus 10%) and we spend twice as much on health care administration than any other nation. In just a few years we will spend a full 19% of our nation's gross domestic product to support this dysfunctional system. The more we spend, the more uninsured we have, and the fewer resources available for education, national defense and economic growth.

I know this issue well, having worked on it for 32 years. Drawing upon that knowledge, and the resources of the Department of Insurance, I published "Priced Out: Health Care in California," a study of the state's health care system. This report suggests 43 specific short-term solutions that address the system's problems. Among these are several that deserve specific attention now: We must avoid systems that encourage the current practice of insurance companies insuring only the healthy; we must make full use of advanced information technology; we must emphasize prevention; and we should design a basic package of benefits and require that it be available to all.

It's long past time for America to establish a system with universal access that allows all Americans to have access to the medical care of their choice. Such a program is not un-American. In fact, for 40 years America has had a universal health insurance system, one that allows every participant to select his or her own medical provider. The system operates on less than 3% administrative costs. No one calls this program socialized medicine. We call it Medicare, and everyone over 65 is eligible.

Fortunately, the stars seem to be aligning for a grand debate on covering the uninsured. Legislative leaders have introduced far-reaching bills, and tomorrow the Governor will release his own proposals. I applaud all of these efforts and I will work as a partner with Governor Schwarzenegger and the legislature to take whatever steps are possible to advance this state and America toward a universal insurance system that controls spiraling costs. On this and every other issue I will put aside partisanship and work as a partner with Governor Schwarzenegger and all of the legislators to seek solutions to the challenges that face our State.

California today is in a worldwide economic race. Will our generation hand our golden economic baton to future generations, or will it burden them with a lead weight? A key to success in our quest for economic growth, social justice and racial harmony is the ability of Californians to find and hold well paying jobs with decent benefits and good, safe working conditions, thus expanding the middle class. It is our task as policymakers to set in place public and private programs, tax systems, and infrastructure that are the foundations for private sector business expansion. Equally important is the right for workers to freely organize and bargain for their wages and working conditions. We must always recognize the fact that our complex society requires that there be equal opportunity and justice for every Californian, whether black or white, Latino or Asian, gay or straight, walking or rolling in a wheelchair.

Working with the Governor, I intend to revamp the California Commission on Economic Development into a powerful tool to identify those policies that advance our quest to continue as the world's economic leader.

We all share deep concerns for our current state of affairs. However, as Martin Luther King Jr., once said, "Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Dr. King had occasion to see the worst instincts of the human heart, but he woke up every day with the confidence that the progress of human history was moving towards a better day.

Our Peace Corps experience in Africa many years ago taught Patti and me that we must row our small boat of hope against what appear to be overwhelming odds. If our effort could create one wave for peace and justice in this world, that wave might reach far and on some distant shore bring hope.

I expect that Dr. King's hope was rooted in the assurance of God's amazing grace...an assurance kindled by the

community which stood together, marched together, and believed together that justice would one day roll down like a river, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

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Patti keeps a plaque on her desk that reads, "It is unlimited what can be accomplished, if you don't mind who gets the credit." We have a chance to start something new, to take a different approach, to embrace selflessness, to truly put people, not political parties, first. We can listen more, talk less and do more. We can speak truth from our hearts and not measure our words with an ear towards politics and how we will be judged. Good ideas are good ideas - it shouldn't matter where they come from. We can roll up our sleeves and we can solve problems together.

And we can follow the teachings of Gandhi, who said, "Become the change we want to see in the world."

-Lt. Governor Garamendi